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The historical roots of multicultural unity along the Upper Guinea Coast and in Guinea-Bissau

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Abstract: *Lusofonia* or *lusophony* is often defined as an identity shared by people in areas that were once colonised by Portugal, which in Africa include Angola, Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and São Tomé and Príncipe. *Lusofonia* assumes that in these places people share something – a language, certainly, but also a history and culture rooted in the Iberian Peninsula. In some ways, it is a re-articulation of Gilberto Freyre's *lusotropicalismo*, the idea that Portuguese were more adaptable than other Europeans to tropical climates and cultures and created more multicultural colonial communities. Those who espouse *lusofonia* often have a political agenda – the strengthening of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP). In this article, we argue that like *lusotropicalismo*, *lusofonia* is a dream; it is not rooted in a historical reality. It is luso-centric in that it ignores the power and persistence of local cultures and gives undue weight to Portuguese influence. With regard to Africa, *lusofonia*'s agenda is elite driven and assumes the inevitability of modernity and globalisation. And we demonstrate that it was through Upper Guinean institutions and

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languages, and not colonial ones, that community and fellowship were most commonly fostered in the past, as they are fostered today. Those seeking the roots of *lusofonia* cannot, then, look to this period of Portuguese-African engagement in Upper Guinea. There Portuguese embraced “black ways.” They operated in a peculiar multicultural space in which people possessed fluid and flexible identities. Portugal did not create that space. *Lusofonia* has not been the foundation for cultural unity. Rather, unity has been found in localised institutions and in Crioulo. In Guinea-Bissau, *lusofonia* is not an indigenous movement. If it is anything, it is the stuff of elites and foreigners and is not rooted in any historical reality.

Keywords: Lusofonia, Upper Guinea Coast, Guinea-Bissau, Portuguese, multicultural

Lusofonia or lusophony is often defined as an identity shared by people in areas that were once colonised by Portugal, which in Africa include Angola, Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and São Tomé and Príncipe.ⁱ *Lusofonia* assumes that in these places people share something – a language, certainly, but also a history and culture rooted in the Iberian Peninsula. In defining *lusofonia*, many defer to the Portuguese philosopher Eduardo Lourenço, who described it as a “community and the fellowship inherent in a fragmented cultural space” (Lourenço 1999, 112).ⁱⁱ In other words, *lusofonia* is multiculturalism Portuguese-style. As Michel Cahen puts it, *lusofonia* is most often conceptualised as a “*peculiar area of intersection with other identities* (European, Indian, Bantu, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, etc.)” in which there exists a “certain ‘weight’ of Portuguese expansion” (Cahen 2013b, 9–10). In some ways it is a re-articulation of Gilberto Freyre’s *lusotropicalismo*, the idea that Portuguese were more adaptable than other Europeans to tropical climates and cultures and created more multicultural colonial communities. Those who espouse *lusofonia* often have a political agenda – the

strengthening of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP).ⁱⁱⁱ As

summed up by Victor Marques dos Santos:

The idea of a Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries... is over a century old, and translates into today's reality as an expression of political will of eight sovereign states. The idea stemmed from the acknowledged existence of shared cultural elements, namely the common use of the Portuguese spoken and written language, as the means of expression of over 230 million people... Portuguese speaking CPLP people and the Portuguese speaking communities spread around the world, define a geographical space of cultural expression that transcends the territorial frontiers of *Lusofonia* as a potential factor of strategic projection. In this context, CPLP stands as the institutional framework that meets the needs for the defense of *Lusofonia* and the development of the Portuguese language both as a cultural heritage element and a factor of strategic projection, whose fostering is in the interest of Portugal as well as of all the other CPLP Member States (dos Santos 2014, 121).

In this article, we argue that like *lusotropicalismo*, *lusofonia* is a dream; it is not rooted in a historical reality. It is luso-centric in that it ignores the power and persistence of local cultures and gives undue weight to Portuguese influence. With regard to Africa, *lusofonia's* agenda is elite driven and assumes the inevitability of modernity and globalisation. It envisions the existence of a global community of Portuguese speakers, and it aims to shape identities accordingly.

How then is it possible that community and fellowship has existed in the culturally fragmented space that is known today as Guinea-Bissau? What other than the legacy of European colonialism fosters multiculturalism? We answer these questions through a look at the history of the Upper Guinea Coast, a region stretching from southern Senegal through Sierra Leone, which includes Guinea-Bissau. We examine how the Portuguese colonised the space and how identities, languages and religions changed within it (Nafafé 2007, 135–154). And we demonstrate that it was through Upper Guinean institutions and languages, and not colonial ones, that community and fellowship were

most commonly fostered in the past, as they are fostered today. This is not to say that Guinea-Bissau has rejected broader alliances – political and cultural connections – with the world beyond its borders. But when seeking alliances, Guinea-Bissau has embraced regional partnerships within Africa – partnerships that have often excluded Portugal and CPLP member states.

The first centuries

The Upper Guinea coast stretches from the Gambia River through to Sierra Leone. As early as the sixteenth century, small numbers of Portuguese men began to settle there, concentrating around Bissau and Cacheu and other port towns. There and elsewhere along the Upper Guinea coast, Portuguese settlers and merchants encountered people from a vast number of ethnic groups among which were Baga, Balanta, Banhun, Biafada, Bijago, Cassanga, Floup, Fula, Jola, Nalu, Papel, Sape, Jolonke, and Mandinka. Some of these groups, and particularly those close to the coast, were divided into small-scale settlements that had relatively decentralised or stateless political structures. Others, and particularly those beyond the immediate coastal strip such as the Mandinka, had more hierarchical structures. Their rulers exercised control over people in large sections of territory (Hawthorne 2003; Brooks 1993, 2003; Horta 2000).

Oral traditions from many of the decentralised groups speak of ethnolinguistic territories, which people in Guinea-Bissau refer to as *chão* (*tchon* in the singular) in a widely spoken creole language called Crioulo (Nafafé 2005, 195–200). In a study of written sources from the years 1440 to 1700, P. E. H. Hair shows how *chão* have been relatively unchanging over centuries (Hair 1967; Lüpke 2016, 3). In other words,

ethnolinguistic groups have been established in about the same locations for considerable time (Lüpke 2016). The reason for this settlement pattern is rooted in the nature of coastal agriculture. Farming methods, soil types, and the unique qualities of the crops people have chosen for planting have permitted coastal groups to remain rooted in the same places for generations.

Fixed settlement patterns combined with great competition between relatively small-scale communities encouraged people to define themselves in particular ways (Mark 1992; Lüpke 2016). Within *chão*, walls, called *tabancas* in Crioulo, often protected communities. As the frequency of slave raiding and overall volume of the external trade in slaves increased in the sixteenth century, walls became so commonplace that the word *tabanca* came to mean “village” or “community.” *Tabancas* continued to have importance through the seventeenth century and especially in the second half of the eighteenth century when the volume of the slave trade from Upper Guinea reached its apex (Hawthorne 2003).

To some extent, slave raiding and trading encouraged the hardening of very localised identities. People looked inward to “their own” – to people in their *tchon* and *tabanca* – for protection during periods of uncertainty and insecurity. Among the most important local identities were what might be called ethnic identities or those defined by linguistic affiliation. But clearly ethnic identities did not, as Western intellectuals have often thought, set limits on human interactions. People in Upper Guinea were multilingual. They married people from outside their ethnic groups. Some were mobile, shifting from *tchon* to *tchon*. Some settled among those from other ethnic groups becoming in time part of a new group. “There were,” Boubacar Barry informs, “Toures,

originally Manding, who became Tukolor or Wolof; Jalloos, originally Peul, became Khaasonke; Moors turned into Naari Kajor; Mane and Sane, originally Joola, surnames were taken by the Manding royalty of Kabu” (Barry 1998, 35).

Moreover ethnicity was not all that defined who people were. Upper Guineans had had multiple and overlapping identities, some of which were often more important than ethnic identities. A man who sometimes identified himself as Balanta might at other times identify himself as a resident of a rural *tabanca* and at other times as a *grumete* (canoe-hand) labouring beside men from other ethnic groups for a merchant in a port town. As a *grumete*, he could work daily among Papel, Fula, Bijago, and Mandinka, joining with them in common cause to defend an employer’s interests or to protest mistreatment by the same employer. In addition to the language of the Balanta, he might have spoken Crioulo, which was a language that developed on the Cape Verde Islands before spreading to the coast in the fifteenth century and was a mixture of coastal Mande languages and Portuguese (Nafafé 2005, 149–151; Barros 1900; Nafafé 2012). He could wear, like all people in Upper Guinea, protective amulets acquired from Muslim priests. But this did not make him Muslim – or only Muslim. He could visit shrines to Balanta ancestors *and* shrines to a natural spirit located in a Papel and Beafada villages. Further, he could attend multi-ethnic masses when Catholic priests were on the coast. He could have a broad range of identities linked to local, Catholic and Islamic religious practices; to his profession; to his village; and to his ethnicity (Hawthorne 2010).

All of this is to say that Upper Guineans defined themselves in many ways – some broad and some narrow. They lived in a fragmented space yet shared a sense of community and the fellowship with many. Upper Guinea was a “*peculiar area of*

intersection” of multiple identities (Cahen 2013, 9-10). But it was not Portugal that made it that way. There was an existing shared cultural space prior to the Portuguese arrival. Europeans, and in particular the Portuguese, stepped into this cultural confluence.

Before the twentieth century, only small numbers of Portuguese and other Europeans settled in Upper Guinea and few survived for long. Those who survived did so by overcoming tropical diseases and being integrated into a Guinean cultural system (Nafafé 2005, 135–145). In written sources, these settlers were called *lançados* since they had been “lanced” or thrown among Africans. On the coast, they fostered trade connections with Atlantic ship captains (Hawthorne 2003, 62). Many learned local languages.^{iv} Some married and produced offspring.^v And all operated within the context of a cultural system that was not their creation. As Lemos Coelho observed, *lançados* “live in this freedom because the King allows it and defends them” (Lemos Coelho 1684).

Others historians have made a similar arguments. For example, Green cites Fernandes, who wrote in 1506 about conversations with people in the region who spoke of earlier times: “The Casamance River is a great trading river... in the kingdom people of all nations are mixed together, Mandinkas, Floups, Balantas and others.” Green then observes that by the time of the Portuguese arrival, the Casamance area was “a multi-cultural zone, where peoples from different kinship lines co-existed” Green provides other examples of this co-existence long before the arrival of Portuguese merchants and outcast traders. Moving on to the first hundred years of Portuguese settlement and trade, he shows how “pre-existing political configurations determined patterns of settlement for Europeans and the shaping of... early mixed communities” (Green 2012, 70).

Those seeking the roots of *lusofonia* cannot, then, look to this period of Portuguese-African engagement in Upper Guinea.^{vi} There Portuguese embraced “black ways.” They operated in a peculiar multicultural space in which people possessed fluid and flexible identities. Portugal did not create that space. A few Portuguese were integrated into it.

To be sure, official Portugal established itself on the Upper Guinea coast in some coastal towns where they constructed fortified areas known as *praças*. The most important were Ziguinchor, Cacheu, Farim, Bissau and Geba. By the eighteenth century, Portuguese and African-born Christian residents of these *praças* were known as *moradores* and, no matter what where they had been born – on the African coast or in Portugal – they called themselves Portuguese. Most were brown skinned, the descendants of relationships among Portuguese men and coastal women. Others had black skin, had been baptised and claimed a Christian-Portuguese identity. But few who had been born on the coast spoke the Portuguese language. Most knew African languages, including Crioulo, which was a language born in Africa and not on the Iberian Peninsula. Moreover, the number of Christians was never many. From the seventeenth through the early nineteenth centuries, priestly accounts and official Portuguese censuses never counted more than several thousand in *praças* (Hawthorne 2010, 226).

And their “Christian Portugueseness” was always questioned. This is best demonstrated with a look at records from the Inquisition. In 1660, inquisitors arrested Crispina Peres, Genebra Lopes, and Izabel Lopes in Cacheu. Each was “brown” in appearance and was a descendant of a relationship between an African woman and European man. Each had been baptised Christian. Nonetheless, each visited *chinas* or

local shrines. Lopes was said to take “palm wine and the blood of chickens to one of these shrines which is only a gunshot away from this settlement, which she has heathen Negroes and Negresses pour over it.” Catholic priests were concerned that shrines played a large part in the lives of most “Christian” coastal residents. As records from inquisitors state, “most of the blacks and some of the whites of this settlement keep these idols and other wrongs in their houses, in which they have more faith than in God.” Crispina had a white Portuguese husband, and both of them consulted Mandinka healers, as did other Portuguese. Among them was Ambrósio Gomes, one of the wealthiest merchants in the area and a man whom Portugal would appoint governor on the coast. Gomes employed a Mandinka woman who made him amulets to keep him healthy. Similar practices are documented well into the eighteenth century. Hence in 1780, a Portuguese official wrote that *moradores* carried out rituals at “pagan” shrines “with more willingness than they carry out the work of divine cult” of Christianity (Hawthorne 2010, 208–223).

To be sure, *praças* were areas of intersection among people possessing multiple identities. But their logic was a very local one and was not something imported from lands to the north. As we have seen, such spaces were commonplace in Upper Guinea. Upper Guineans had long mixed and mingled in a great variety of spaces. And they had long embraced some of the linguistic, cultural and religious elements of people who came into their midst. Portugal did not invent areas of cultural intersection in Upper Guinea. Portuguese who settled in Upper Guinea before the nineteenth century adapted to local customs and engaged in local cultural practices. They did not introduce something new. They became part of something with a deep Upper Guinean history.

From the nineteenth century

So what of later periods? In the early nineteenth century, the legal export trade in slaves from Upper Guinea ended and, threatened by advances from Britain and France, Portugal moved to shore up claims it had long made to having a place in the region. However, as R. J. Hammond writes of the whole of the continent, “The Portuguese dominions on the African mainland were quite limited in extent so far as direct sovereignty was concerned, whatever their claims might have been under the vaguer headings of suzerainty or sphere of influence” (Hammond 1966, 37). Hence, throughout the nineteenth century, representatives of the Portuguese state would try in vain to regulate and tax commerce.

Descriptions of Portuguese “strongholds” make clear why Portugal failed. With the permission of local chiefs, Portugal finished the walled fort named Praça de José de Bissau in 1775. It housed ragtag Portuguese troops who were at the mercy of their African neighbours. Troops needed to leave the fort for food and water, and when tensions flared between local Papel and Portuguese soldiers, access to these things was denied. (Valdez 1851, 238; Mollien 1967, 336–337). Conditions in this and in other *praças* were so horrendous that Portugal had to rely on convicts and other undesirables (*degradados*) to man them. Some survived and through relationships with African women integrated into local societies and found homes for themselves. But many died from malaria or succumbed to dysentery or one of the myriad diseases that ran rampant due to poor sanitary conditions. For this, over the course of the nineteenth century, troops from Portugal were increasingly replaced with Guinea-born and Cape Verdean recruits.

Soldiers of all colors, lacking shoes and uniforms, “most of them... clothed in rags” and “some nude” suffered mightily in *praças* (Hawthorne 1998, 227).

In 1818, Gaspard Mollien described one – the *praça* of Geba. Geba is a village entirely of mud houses; there is no fort; some black soldiers cause respect to be paid to the government, which is supported by mildness rather than by actual force. Bounded on the south by a marshy river, and on the east by mountains, it is perhaps one of the most unhealthy spots on the face of the globe. We saw but three Europeans there, but their faces were so emaciated by the pernicious influence of the climate that they might have been taken for spectres returned from the tomb. (Mollien 1967, 335)

And in 1824, an American missionary described the *praça* at Bissau as being little better.

[The soldiers] received from the Portuguese Government a miserable monthly allowance of Tobacco, Rum, and other articles suitable to barter with the natives for Yams, Rice and Fish.... The whole number of convicts, all of whom are enrolled on the garrison books, and compelled to do the duty of soldiers, attached to Bissau and its dependents, is about 250. Half of these are from Lisbon—the balance, coloured people and negroes, from the Cape Verde Islands. The whites... are perhaps of all the human race, the most depressed, spiritless and refuse. Considered as animals.... Ignorant, despairing, unprincipled, if they have not energy to commit crimes, they have scarce a restraining motive remaining to save them from wallowing in the most swinish vice. (Quoted in Brooks 1983, 306)

Are the historical roots of *lusofonia* in these *praças* in the nineteenth century? To be sure, areas around *praças* saw, as they had in previous centuries, a great deal of multicultural mixing. But mixing took place in the context of coastal cultural norms, which had long fostered it. As Januario Correia de Almeida described in 1859, near Bissau a daily market at Bandim, which was controlled by a Papel king, attracted “Papels, Balantas, Bijagos” who competed among themselves and with *grumetes* to attract buyers for their goods (Almeida 1859, 16).

Much to Portugal’s dismay, Europeans from a variety of countries were often welcome in coastal markets. They “cast anchor and negotiate directly with the blacks” (Monteiro 1853, 149). And thus continued the pattern throughout most of the nineteenth century. Portugal had little influence over events on the coast. They could not keep out

rivals or control regional trade. Despite centuries of Portuguese interaction with locals, almost none spoke Portuguese. Crioulo was the language of choice among Africans in *praças*; local languages were spoken elsewhere. And everywhere across the coastal strip local beliefs along with some elements drawn from Islam, Catholicism and Judaism informed people's religious practices.^{vii}

But the late nineteenth century brought a change. It was then that European competition for territory in Africa increased greatly during what has been called the “scramble for Africa.” As Portugal, Britain, France, Germany and Belgium moved to compel Africans across the continent to sign treaties, some local leaders conceded and others chose to resist. And in the politically decentralised coastal strip of Upper Guinea, there were many who resisted. Thus, around Bissau, Portugal began to launch attacks on areas of major concentration of people. Between 1878 and 1880, they struck at Felup and Manjaco areas. From 1880 to 1882, they turned their attention to Beafada. The next decade saw military expeditions against Balanta and Papel (Lobban 1979, 96). All the while Portuguese officials attempted to force Africans to produce goods and generate revenues to benefit Portugal itself. But *leis de trabalho* and *impostos de palhota* proved unpopular and people's resistance effective – at least through the first two decades of the twentieth century. Hence, in 1905 the *Sociedade de Geographia de Lisboa* would lament that it could “boldly say that... some of the richest regions of the province, like Oio, Bassarel, the Coasta de Baixo, the Bijagos Islands, and the areas of the Balanta” remained “completely unsubdued.” It continued, “Almost all of these populations have been at times defeated by our forces, but even with the victories the state of rebellion continues” (Boletim da Sociedade da Geographia de Lisboa 1905, 396).

Quelling this state of rebellion was tasked to Portuguese commander João Teixeira Pinto. Relying heavily on a mercenary named Abdul Injai to recruit African troops and to direct strikes on area *tabancas*, Pinto launched a brutal campaign of “pacification” in 1912. During this campaign, as Pinto himself noted, coastal people “united” so that they could “defend themselves against the Government” (Pinto 1974, 127). Being ignorant of the region’s history, Pinto said that in earlier times, the region’s people had been “constantly in war” with one another and that this unity was something new. But, as we have seen, this was not the case. Many indigenous cross-cutting institutions had long brought together the people of Upper Guinea’s multicultural landscape. And so they did again in the midst of Portuguese military aggressions.

Ultimately, of course, coastal groups could not stop the Portuguese advance. As historian René Pélissier writes, the Injai-Pinto strategy was to cause the “destruction of the maximum number of *tabancas*” and “to kill the maximum number of men” (Pélissier 1989, 164). Similarly, Joshua Forrest argues, “Crucial to the success of the Injai-Pinto expedition was the unbridled use of state terror.” And he documents the “systematic killings of unarmed civilians, the massive theft of village property, the destruction of livestock, and the capturing of young men and forced conscription as colonial auxiliaries” (Forrest 2003, 116). Thus was born the colonial state.

Taxes and forced labour followed in an area that was dubbed Portuguese Guinea. Forrest aptly describes the Portuguese colonialism in the area as both fragile and violent. The state drafted some locals into its service and used them effectively to quell resistance. Through them, it succeeded in conscripting labour for public works projects, and it succeeded in some areas in collecting taxes. But its ability to reshape and co-opt

coastal social, cultural and political structures was limited. Most coastal people saw the colonial state as illegitimate, so violence was the only way to move locals to act in the service of the state. Following Forrest, Portugal relied on a “terrorist mode of repression” (Forrest 2003, 141).

The voices of coastal people Hawthorne interviewed in the 1990s tell the story well. Many remembered *cipaïos* or Africans who worked as police for the colonial regime, rounding up labour for projects. One man told me that *cipaïos* oversaw the construction of roads but often found it difficult to gather workers. “Thus, they arranged their own representatives [appointed chiefs of *tabancas*] to aid in recruitment. For the *tabanca* that did not follow through, the Fula [*cipaïos*] arrived to seize their livestock or to carry the representative to the post where he was beaten.” Another informant explained that if *cipaïos* arrived to recruit someone for a forced labour project and the person fled, “the *cipaïos*... would carry away an elder man or woman of the household and whip him or her with a *chicote* and put him or her to work in forced labor in place of the person who had fled.” And a woman said, “Balanta women participated in forced labor. During the labor, no woman had the courage to stop or sit to breast feed her child, even when he or she was crying on her back.” Another woman dropped her head as she resurrected memories of *cipaïos* carrying away “many women to the post at Nhacra. There, they always tried to rape them. Those who resisted were beaten a great deal. But if there was one who consented, she was not beaten” (Hawthorne 1998, 306–308).

Despite the fact that it applied systematic violence in an attempt to subdue the population, the state could never break local social, political and religious structures that had long held sway in *tabancas*, united people across *chão*, and were a means of

resistance to colonial oppression. As an example of this, we turn to Eve Crowley's influential study of coastal spirit shrines. Throughout the colonial period, religious leaders who controlled local spirit shrines, Crowley shows, gained considerable influence. And as they did spirit societies became important political forces and sources of social unity, particularly in areas north of Bissau and the Geba River. This unity, Crowley argues, was multiethnic and offered people an alternative to the broad power of the colonial state. Of course, shrines had long attracted people from a broad range of *tabancas* and a large number of *chão*. Shrines and markets had long operated as sites of conviviality in bringing people together despite existing rivalry. And from the 1920s through the 1960s, shrines served a new purpose – uniting people in opposition to colonial oppression (Crowley 1990,2000). As in centuries past, African institutions provided the mechanisms for fostering multiethnic unity.

But Portugal did not recognise the strength of local institutions. The colonial gaze saw only a fragmented space, a space that possessed no institutions that were familiar, a space that *needed* Portugal to bring its brand of “civilization” to it. As anthropologist Joanna Davidson explains, the state professed a “rhetoric of multiracial unity.” She continues, “Portugal perceived its colonizing mission as a way to unite people in a grand Lusotropical culture regardless of geography, race, or ethnicity” (Davidson 2002). This discourse became most intense when independence movements intensified in the 1960s; certain ethnic groups were afforded privileges by the Portuguese in detriment to others. It was then that officials like the Portuguese Overseas Minister, Adriano Moreira, spoke of his country's policy of “multi-racial integration.” Perhaps Portugal believed that its colonies were part of “one lusophone nation” and that in them was found the “equal

dignity of all men.” However, Portugal was not as a colonial power able to create a multi-racial nation that spanned continents and possessed a population that saw itself as one. Its rhetoric did not match reality. But did that Portuguese rhetoric have any long-term impact in Guinea Bissau? In our view, local institutions continued to play a predominant role in shaping Bissau Guinean culture and politics in the post-colonial as in the colonial period. That said, we would welcome Davidson calls for studies of “how Portuguese integrationist and colorblind colonial rhetoric worked itself out on the ground” (Davidson 2002, 422–423). Upper Guinean institutions were, after all, integrationist themselves. They were not fixed in time. They allowed for the incorporation of ideas from the outside and adapted (Nafafé 2013).

By the early by 1960s, an anticolonial uprising that stretched broadly across Portuguese Guinea challenged Portuguese rule. The movement generated effective, widespread interethnic solidarity that had historic roots stretching back through the colonial and deep into the precolonial period. Organization took place under the PAIGC and its charismatic leader Cabral, who believed that ethnic heterogeneity was not a barrier to national unity (Nafafé 2013, 34–38). And, to be sure, during the war “ethnic logic” did not determine who participated, who remained neutral, and who sided with the Portuguese. The PAIGC recruited for and managed well a multi-ethnic movement. Its armed struggle succeeded with people from all ethnic groups working in coordination, including Cape Verdeans among whom were key figures who played important role in shaping ideologies of the party, such as Cabral himself, Aristides Pereira, Pedro Pires and Carmen Pereira.^{viii} Importantly, the principle language of communication for those

involved in the armed struggle was not Portuguese. It was Crioulo, especially, but also Balanta and other local languages.

And after the war, the Portuguese language did not see an upsurge in use. Rather, Crioulo did. Unlike in most of the rest of Africa, where English and French have provided a means for inter-ethnic communication, in what emerged as Guinea-Bissau an indigenous language has been embraced. This is something in which Bissau Guineans today take great pride, the past few generations learning Crioulo in their communities as their first or second language (after an indigenous language) and studying Portuguese, and increasingly French, as a third language in school (Kohl 2010; Davidson 2002, 421–423; Scantamburlo 1999). This has prompted some observers to dub Portuguese “a foreign language” and given rise to experiments to teach it as such in schools, children initially receiving instruction in Crioulo and later being introduced to Portuguese as they continue their educations (Benson 2004). It should be emphasised, following data collected by Carol Benson, that in Guinea Bissau “women were overwhelmingly monolingual or bilingual in two Guinean languages, while most men reported being bilingual in the mother tongue and the creole, and many of the latter also claimed to know some Portuguese” (Benson 2001, 89). This is to say that there is a gendered dimension to language acquisition, Portuguese being the language of few and of those who speak it most being male.

The embrace of a common local language, Crioulo, in part explains why in post-colonial Guinea-Bissau, relative interethnic harmony has continued. Interethnic communication has been the norm. And Crioulo has made great gains. Christoph Kohl shows that it was understood by 80% of people, even in the countryside, in 2010.

Compare this to figures of 44% in 1979 and 51% in 1991 (Kohl 2010; Davidson 2002; Knörr and Filho 2010). Other factors are also important for relative interethnic harmony. Guinea-Bissau's military has effectively integrated people from multiple ethnic groups. Guineans have felt equally poorly served by their own national elites, their multiethnic government, and the international community. And the post-colonial state itself has proven to be as weak and ineffectual as the colonial state at centralising power. Local authorities wield power at the *tabanca* level and do not serve as links between the state and the people. This means that the state has not been able to penetrate into the rural political arena so the pre-existing and multicultural institutions that have long linked people in the region continue to shape people's lives on a day-to-day basis.

For many in Guinea-Bissau, and particularly the youth, Crioulo is an enabling language, which should be seen as just as rich and expressive as Portuguese. And thus much of the literature and music produced in the country comes in Crioulo form. Take for example the work of Odete Semedo, a Bissau Guinean writer. Semedo without employing the term *lusofonia*, questions the validity of the Portuguese language in retaining cultural values for future generation of Bissau Guineans (Afolabi 2001; Semedo and Ribeiro 2011, 13). And why not? *Lusofonia* has not been the foundation for cultural unity. Rather, unity has been found in localised institutions and in Crioulo. Thus the Bible Society has produced a New Testament version of the Bible in Crioulo (Nobu Testamentu-Crioulo Biblia). And the songs that fill nightclubs in Bissau and in Europe when a Bissau Guinean singers such as Anastacio Djéns and Kid Charles are in Guinea-informed rhythms and Crioulo. These performers follow from Ernesto Dabo, super Mama

Djombo and Kaba Mané who shaped the Bissau Guinean music scene in the 1970s and 1980s.

Portugal, however, still harbours the view that Guinea-Bissau, like other former colonies, reflects its image through *lusofonia*. Portuguese politicians often use Cabo Verde as an example of *lusofonia* that the rest of lusophone African countries should follow. They claim that Cabo Verde has maintained its cultural, political and economic ties with Portugal and because of this has been able to avoid economic downturns such as those that have impacted Guinea-Bissau. Portugal saw itself as gateway for lusophone countries to the European economy. Lusophone countries will be able to usher in economic development, the argument goes, if they stay loyal to the ideology of *lusofonia*.

However, such claims fail to acknowledge the geographical position of Cabo Verde in relation to Guinea Bissau and other lusophone African countries. First, Cabo Verde has benefited from its geographical location as a trade hub in the Atlantic that links it to the main land Africa, Europe and the Americas. Second, Cabo Verde continues to have blood-tie privileges with Portugal that other lusophone African countries do not have. As a result, Cabo Verde gets preferential treatment compared to the rest of the lusophone African countries. Third, Cabo Verde did not suffer from the colonial wars that Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique did. All of these factors contribute to making Cabo Verde unique among the former Portuguese colonies in Africa (Castles and Miller 1993; Ishemo 1995; Jørgen 2002).

Today, Guinea Bissau has chosen to de-emphasise its economic ties with Portugal and to focus on new partnerships (Cabral 1980). The country has reconfigured its relationship with Portugal by becoming a member of the Economic Community of

West African States (ECOWAS), which in French is known as Communauté Économique des Etats de l’Afrique de l’Ouest (CEDEAO). It also joined the Financial Community of Africa (Communauté Financière d’Afrique), adopting the currency used in most francophone West African countries. In so doing, Guinea-Bissau’s economic focus shifted from Portugal to France (Nafafé 2013, 42–44).

Guinea-Bissau has also questioned its ties with the CPLP. This was precipitated by Angolan actions during a coup in Guinea-Bissau in April 2012. Then, many Bissau Guineans resented Angolan intervention on the side of the government. Many saw Angola as attempting to determine events rather than letting locals determine their own future. And they understood Angola’s justification as being rooted in the fact that both countries were former Portuguese colonies, were part of a lusophone alliance, one that many in Guinea-Bissau did not embrace.^{ix} And in the aftermath of the coup, Guinea-Bissau turned increasingly from the CPLP to other alliances, and especially ECOWAS, which includes its immediate neighbours, Senegal, Guinea Conakry and the Gambia.

Conclusion

In Guinea-Bissau, *lusofonia* is not an indigenous movement. It is not a rallying cry for people in rural or urban areas. It is not a consideration for people who work daily to put food on their communities’ tables. If it is anything, it is the stuff of elites and foreigners and is not rooted in any historical reality. It arises from what Toby Green calls an official “Portuguese perceptions regarding the superiority of ‘imperial’ peoples.” (Green 2012, 52). Green makes this observation in a discussion of the concept of Mandinguisation – the supposed spread of Mandinka (or Mandinga) language, influence

and customs throughout the whole of Upper Guinea. As early as the sixteenth century, Portuguese writers such as Pacheco Pereira, described this process. For Pereira and Portuguese who wrote for centuries after him, Mandinka were superior to others in Upper Guinea. Why? Mandinka possessed a highly stratified society with identifiable elites, a formidable military, and a slave class. And Mandinka produced a considerable number of items for trade. They appeared to control an empire and through it, the Portuguese thought, advanced the region economically, socially and politically (Green 2012, 52, 94).^x

In the twentieth century, Portugal, propaganda had it, did the same – elevated the region by making it part of its empire. As Gilberto Freyre wrote in 1961, “From the 15th century onward, a new type of civilization commenced, for which a characterization as Lusotropical is suggested.” Freyre applied the term *lusotropicalism* or *lusotropicology* because, in his words, “the highest and most complex human knowledge... is that which for centuries has been expressed in European language.” “Lusotropical civilization,” he continued, “is no more than this: a common culture and social order to which men and groups of diverse ethnic and cultural origins contribute by interpenetration and by accommodation to a certain number of behavioral uniformities of the European and his descendant and successor in the tropics” (Freyre quoted in Chilcote 1972, 19–20). Others wrote in the same vein. “We believe, therefore,” Adriano Moreira, said in 1961, “that Africa gained when we implanted there the ideas of State and of Nation, which were alien to its people. We think it was of incalculable benefit to it that some of its territories were integrated within one political unit together with European peoples who could supply

Africa with what its peoples lacked and could not have obtained by themselves for a long time” (Moreira 1961 quoted in Chilcote 1972, 12).

Mandinguisation, *lusotropicalism*, lusophony. Central to each of these is the idea that local knowledge, ways of doing things, and modes of living are inferior and need to be changed; and that societies can be elevated if they become part of something larger – an empire, a global society. Core to them is a telling of history that assumes indigenous institutions have been unchanging, do not allow people to maintain peaceful relations with one another, and do not engage effectively with the outside world. That is, the tenants of each are rooted in a telling of history that people in Guinea-Bissau do not subscribe to.

Of course, Freyre and Moreia’s praise of past and present benefits of empire was challenged by a more persuasive argument – one that gave a different telling of history and a different account of the conditions in colonies. “Your colonialist ancestors conquered Guiné by force,” Cabral wrote to Portuguese living Portuguese Guinea in 1960. “They enslaved, they sold, they massacred, they dominated, and they exploited the people of Guiné for five centuries. Today in defense of certain Portuguese and non-Portuguese enterprises, the colonists persecute, arrest, torture, and massacre the people of Guiné and Cabo Verde, who are fighting to reclaim the liberty and dignity of the people of Guiné” (Cabral quoted in Chilcote 1972, 335).

Like *lusotropicalismo*, *lusofonia* is a dream; it is not rooted in a historical reality that people in Guinea-Bissau subscribe to. It credits Portuguese influence in Africa for the unity of people, and ignores the power and persistence of local cultures. Its agenda is elite driven and assumes the inevitability of modernity and globalisation. With regard to

Guinea-Bissau, it does not recognise that community and fellowship have long been fostered in a “fragmented cultural space” possessing many ethnic groups. In Guinea-Bissau, the story of the intersection of multiple cultures is told today, as it long has been, in languages born in Africa.

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Notes

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For more on how *lusofonia* has been conceptualised in scholarship and popular discourse, see Michel Cahen (2013a) .

ii Eduardo Lourenço (1999, 112). For further debate on *lusofonia*, see C.A. Faraco (2011) ; C. Cunha (1975); M. L. de Carvalho Armando (1994); F. dos Santos Neves (2000).

iii CPLP is also known as PALOP (Países Africanos da Língua Oficial Portuguesa).

iv A. Á. Almada (1594, ch. 2, fol. 16v), . “chamado pellos negros ho ganagoga q querdizer na lingua dos Beafares homẽ q falla todas as linguas como de feito as fallam. E pode este homẽ atravessar todo o sertao do nosso guine de quaes quer negros que seja” [Ganagoga in the Beafada’s language means a man who speaks all languages, as they do, he can cross the whole of hinterland of our Guinea and [talk] to whatever Negroes there may be].

v L. Silveira (1945, 77), “e me respondeu que hera filho de portugal, e que passaua de uinte annos q moraua ao pê daquela Serra, em sitio tão escondido, e ratirado, pera q ninguem soubesse delle, o qual ueuia a ley dos gentios da terra, e tinha noue molheres e muitos filhos” [and he said to me that he was a son of Portugal who had been living at the foot of that Sierra, in a place closely concealed and very remote for more than twenty years, in order that no one should know about him. He lived there according to the heathens’ law of the land and had nine wives and many children].

vi For studies African-European cultural exchange in the period, see Walter Rodney (1970),; J. L. Nafafé (2007); P. J. Havik (2004).

vii On the influence of Judaism on the coast, Peter Mark and José Silva da Horta (2011).

viii Forrest (2003 181–183). The conflict between Bissau Guinean and Caboverdean emerged as a result of constitutional dispute, in particular on the penal system which Guinea-Bissau has and Cabo Verde does not. See Carlos Lopes (1987).

ix Doka Internacional, n.d.; Intelectuais Balantas na Diáspora, n.d..

^x *Ibid.*, 52, 94

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